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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 001004

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SUBJECT: JUNTA LEADER FAL WELCOMES ELECTION OBSERVER
MISSIONS

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 1003

Classified By: AMB JLEBARON, REASONS 1.4 (b),(d)

(C) Key Points

-- In a farewell call August 17th, Ambassador strongly encouraged Fal to allow international groups to observe Mauritania's parliamentary elections in November and presidential election next March.

-- Fal welcomed all observer missions. He added that Mauritania was close to concluding an MOU with the European Union on an observer mission.

-- In a later meeting with the Foreign Minister, Ambassador stressed again the importance of not restricting observer missions in any way.

-- Ambassador left a non-paper listing seven steps Mauritania should take to ensure free and fair elections. Fal was receptive to them all, and said actions on some of them already were underway.

(C) Comments

-- Ambassador detects no slippage in Fal's intention to see Mauritania's ambitious election cycle through. But the wild card of another coup, an assassination, or some other shock to the political system is ever present.

-- Mauritania's strategic orientation towards the United States also appears to remain intact, even though the USG has (correctly) limited several areas of engagement with Mauritania during this transitional period.

-- In a brief private conversation between Fal and Ambassador at the end of the meeting, Fal stressed that he would continue to orient Mauritania strategically toward the West, and the United States, specifically.

-- If and when Mauritania gets a democratically elected government next March, Ambassador believes the USG will have

a major opportunity to help democratic institutions take root in this Islamic Republic.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (U) On August 17, Ambassador paid a farewell call on Col. Fal, at which the two discussed the democratic transition and Mauritanian policy on the situation in Lebanon (reftel). Also present were FM Ahmed Ould Sid'Ahmed and DCM (notetaker).

¶2. (C) Ambassador stressed the importance to the USG that the November municipal and legislative elections and the March 2007 presidential elections be seen as free and fair by both Mauritians and the International Community alike. He left behind a non-paper listing seven measures that the Embassy believed would enhance future elections (see para. 9).

¶3. (C) Fal began by noting that it was his concern that went beyond having credible elections to creating a "true spirit of democracy" in Mauritania. Political parties and civil society must abandon their "culture of contradiction and confrontation" to a democratic system where "everyone accepts results through consultation."

¶4. (C) Ambassador noted that of immediate importance was that the Mauritians accept a proposed EU observer mission for the elections as sending a clear signal of Fal's seriousness in having free and fair elections.

¶5. (C) Fal replied that the Mauritians had no objection "in principle" to any international observer mission coming to Mauritania. He said that the EU and Mauritania were in negotiations on an MOU and he fully expected the MOU to be

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signed upon the return of the EU Ambassador from vacation.

¶6. (C) FM Sid'Ahmed raised the issue again during the Ambassador's farewell call on him later that day. Sid'Ahmed asked whether the USG would have an objection to the EU mission given that NDI was seeking to bring in an observer mission of its own. Ambassador noted there was talk that the Carter Center was interested in sending a mission here, but funding was a problem. He promised to raise the issue of a U.S. observer mission during his consultations in Washington. That said, the USG would certainly welcome the EU mission.

¶7. (C) FM Sid'Ahmed repeated Fal's point that Mauritania did not object to the mission, but added that they were disappointed that the EU had chosen the model they used for the elections in the Congo. The circumstances there were entirely different. The government wanted to "safeguard Mauritanian sovereignty and ensure that the institutions entrusted to elections are respected." He noted that he was to meet with Fal after this meeting to discuss the draft MOU.

¶8. (C) Ambassador replied that while he understood the Mauritanian position, he warned not to quibble too much on the details as any effort to limit the mission would be taken that the Mauritians had something to hide. Repeating what he said to Fal, Ambassador concluded, "perception is critical."

¶9. (C) BEGIN NON-PAPER POINTS:

-- Reopen the voter lists before November's municipal and legislative elections to allow additional Mauritians to register and vote. This is a most important issue.

-- Provide more intensive training to poll workers and electoral commission representatives to ensure that electoral procedures are consistently followed throughout the country. This was a significant problem in the referendum.

-- Provide more guidance and training to security forces posted at polling stations to ensure that voters do not feel

intimidated. This was also a problem in the referendum.

-- Allow international and domestic observers (including political party and civil society organizations) to participate in election observations.

-- Enhance the role of political parties and civil society in the electoral process, to ensure their support for the democratic transition.

-- Improve the legal framework for resolving electoral disputes and for educating political parties and civil society about these procedures.

-- Ensure the neutrality of the government in the coming elections.

END POINTS
LeBaron